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GREEK AND LATIN IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS, ANOTHER PROPOSAL.

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UNLESS TEACHERS OF CLASSICAL LANGUAGES ARE WILLING OR ABLE TO TEACH READING, AS DISTINCT FROM DECIPHERING AND TRANSLATING, CLASSICAL LANGUAGES IN HIGH SCHOOLS ARE DOOMED. TWO OTHER PROPOSALS THE PROFESSION SHOULD ACT UPON ARE THAT THE REASONABLE MINIMUM FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDY OF GREEK AND/OR LATIN SHOULD BE 4 YEARS AND THAT EXPERIMENTATION SHOULD BE MADE WITH THE TEACHING OF LATIN AND GREEK TOGETHER TO ESPECIALLY MOTIVATED STUDENTS. (AF)

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GREEK AND LATIN IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS: ANOTHER PROPOSAL[1]

It took a professor of English to spearhead the reform of modern foreign language teaching in this country. As Executive Secretary of the Modern Language Association and as first Director of the Language Development Program in the U. S. Office of Education, William R. Parker, a distinguished Milton scholar, gave almost a decade of his life to this task. More recently he has expressed his concern for another segment of American humanistic education in a statement on "The Case for Latin." (*PMLA*, Sept., 1964, pp. 3–10)

Since I share his concern but see the problem of the classics in a somewhat different light, I should like to state my views here in the form of a suggestion to teachers of the classics.

When the traditional four years of Latin study for college-bound students—over half of high-school graduates now go on to college—shrank to two, the survival of the classics in American secondary education was gravely jeopardized. I saw, with some consternation, during a year spent in Chile, what the natural next step is, when I learned that in most Latin American countries neither Greek nor Latin is any longer studied in the secondary schools.

As a teacher of modern foreign languages with a concern for the humanities, I am naturally distressed by this trend, which, left to take its course, will ultimately reduce American education to something myopic, dull, pragmatic, and mediocre.

What's to do? It would be pretentious for an outsider to appraise the quality of teaching in the field of the classics. Like every other subject, it must have its share of incompetent teachers as I know that it has more than its share of inspired teachers and scholars. What strikes me is that they are *all* doomed to a vanish-

[1] In "A Modest Proposal" (ARION 4.3), D. S. Carne-Ross outlined the case for a two-month summer course designed for people who wanted a rapid, intensive grounding in Greek. We would also draw attention to a related article in the same issue, "A New Greek Grammar," by David Armstrong and Frederick Ahl. *Eds.*

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ing role unless as individuals and collectively as a profession they take quite radical steps.

These I would state in the form of a social contract: "We teachers of Greek and Latin, firmly united in a common purpose, solemnly pledge that we will, given a reasonable chance, undertake to teach any motivated high-school student of more than average ability to *read* (not merely decipher and translate) classical Greek or Latin. In consideration of this pledge, we earnestly request four years of time in the high-school course of study as the reasonable minimum in which we can be expected to accomplish our objective: the study of Greek, Latin, or both together."

I am confident that there are *some* teachers of Greek or Latin who are capable of *reading* these languages and who can teach, or can learn how to teach, this skill to willing learners. I believe this despite the fact that in five years of Latin in "good" institutions I never had such a teacher. I would say, quite simply, that if the profession is either unwilling or unable to demonstrate that it can learn how to teach *reading*—as distinct from decoding—then classical languages in our high schools are doomed.

One word concerning the proposal for "Greek, Latin, or both together." Since I believe Greek has at least as much title as Latin to be included in the high-school course of study, I have never understood the apparent willingness of my colleagues in classics to allow Greek to become defunct in the high schools. On this issue, I hope they will move from feeble protests to effective action. I should also like to enter a plea for experimenting with the teaching of Greek and Latin together to especially motivated students. This combination seems to me just as logical as that of chemistry and physics.

I do not contend that my suggested course of action is easy, only that it is indispensable. It is not easy for any professional group to decide to reform its teaching rather than defend the *status quo*. Having made this inescapable decision, it would not be easy to identify those exceptional teachers who *can* read a classical language, nor would it be easy, even using these exceptional teachers as a nucleus, to learn how to *teach* this skill, first to interested teachers and then to willing students. I firmly believe that, once a few convincing steps have been taken by leaders in the classics, with the support of the profession as a whole, the American public will rally to the support of the classicists and foundation and government grants will be forthcoming to assist in carrying out the needed reforms.

Theodore Andersson